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Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke
van die Kaap, Natal en Transvaal

# Dutch Reformed Church

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

No. 46 | 119, De Korte Street, Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa. | Sept. 1961

## A WORD OF PROTEST

Our readers know that we seldom react, in this newsletter, to attacks from abroad on our church and our country. Occasionally we do reply privately and directly to the persons or publications concerned, but more often we disregard such allegations in the conviction that truth will eventually prevail.

Nevertheless, our readers may be interested in a few examples of the kind of reporting to which we are occasionally subjected. The American magazine "Presbyterian Life", for instance, recently published a paragraph about the position of the non-white inhabitants of South-West Africa which evoked the following comment from Die Kerkbode: "It is shocking that such a piece, with such regrettable disregard of the facts, could appear in print. Reports like this leave one dumbfounded . . . It is painful that a church magazine can publish such third-rate evidence without being able to distinguish the malice and the untruths contained therein."

From Great Britain comes a press report which says that the South African image in that country is due for another coat of blackening when a propagandist film entitled "Let My People Go" starts a commercial run in a London cinema. One British critic says: "As a political tract it may be effective enough in the way that advertising films are presumably effective, but it has no other discernible merit." In this film the commentator has the effrontery to tell the audience that a Sharpeville "in the name of the law, in the name of white civilisation, in the name of the Dutch Reformed Church, of the Nationalist government, of apartheid — the police went in."

We cannot find words to express our amazement at the malice which prompts such a statement, and we can hardly believe that the British public is gullible enough to swallow such cheap propaganda. We are now anxiously waiting to hear in the name of which churches the rioters

murdered the policemen in Cato Manor and Port Elizabeth, and in the name of which churches the British troops "went in" against the Mau-Mau terrorists in Kenya.

Some months ago the editor of a church magazine in America sent us a clipping which alleged that a chapel serving 2,000 Coloured Roman Catholics had been demolished by an administrative commission led by the Dutch Reformed Church. Our correspondent observed: "I am sure that it is either twisted or a half-truth". The facts support his view, as it appears that the so-called "chapel" was nothing but a small reed hut without windows, that it was erected by a private person without the permission of the legal owner of the land (the owner being the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk), that it was erected under false pretences, that nobody was prepared to admit ownership of the structure, and that only 31 Roman Catholic families live on the settlement concerned. In this case, however, the overseas magazines were not primarily to blame, as the report first appeared in certain afternoon newspapers in South Africa.

So we can continue. We can refer, for instance, to the ridiculous article about "slave camps" published in the Dutch magazine "Militia Christi" (under the editorship of Dr. J. J. Buskes) or to the stories about Nazi infiltration published in "The English Churchman" — a newspaper which itself had expressed doubts a year earlier as to whether it was getting a true picture of South Africa.

But perhaps we should not be too harsh on the authors of the terror tales. After all, as a Rhodesian magazine remarked in a review of a new novel: "Dialogue of this sort makes ludicrous reading in Africa, but it should have great appeal for the public for which it was written."

On the other hand, one would not expect a leading person like Sir Francis Ibiam to say that certain governments, including those of South Africa and the Central African Federation, "hold that Africans are not human beings but slaves for their own benefit and comfort" (as reported in the British Weekly). One would rather expect it from some of the sensationalist journalists who descend upon South Africa from time to time, as happened before the inauguration of the Republic. Discussing the reports published in certain overseas newpapers on that occasion, a columnist of a South African newspaper stated: "Small wonder that visitors to South Africa are often astonished that they find white South Africans, particularly the Afrikaners, quite different from what they expect". One such journalist was heard to boast openly that if they did not find incidents, they would create them.

Recently Mr. Mennen Williams, Assistant United States Secretary of State for African Affairs, complained that Africans were "not being given a true picture of our racial problem in the South". If Mr. Williams finds it necessary to complain about the reporting of American incidents in the press in Africa, we wonder what must be said about the picture of South African affairs presented in many overseas newspapers.

We hope we are not expecting too much when we ask Christian leaders and magazines in other countries to heed the advice of the former

Archbishop of Canterbury when he said: "Churchmen have a right to speak out on public issues. But there are always two sides to every question, and comment must always recognise their existence". In his instruction guide to clergymen Dr. Fisher stated that criticisms of policies were often necessary, but that the Christian in making them would never forget that his business was to reconcile conflicting persons and their divergent views, and that he would never use scornful or abusive or disrespectful words about views or the holders of the views with which or with whom he disagreed. The Archbishop accepted that a churchman would often have to comment on the particular ways in which principles were applied to issues, but stated: "If he is wise he will always remember to remind himself and others that all the facts are rarely known, and that violent reactions to what may be known will prevent a man from assessing even those facts in their proportion."

Finally, we may also quote from an editorial in the Christian Century (U.S.A.): "The danger of accepting at face value the news items in either the secular or religious press is illustrated by the handling of a recent story from Cuba . . . The incident illustrates the necessity for Christians to be doubly careful in checking the facts before repeating defamatory reports about the Christian movement. Otherwise they appear to isolate and criticize fellow Christians at the moment of their greatest need for understanding." If only the Christian Century and some of its comtemporaries would apply the same criterion to South Africa!

We are hesitant to do so but perhaps we should tell our overseas readers about a cartoon which has appeared in a local newspaper. It pictured South Africa as a person humbly praying in the corner of a large cathedral. A few yards from him stood a group with their arms stretched to the sky. The caption (with reference to St. Luke 18:9-14) read: "We thank thee that we are not like South Africa".

## IN BRIEF

• Dr. Ralph W. Lloyd, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (World Presbyterian Alliance) will visit the member churches in South Africa from October 4 to 23. The alliance has eleven members in South Africa, namely the Presbyterian Church, the Bantu Presbyterian Church, the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, and eight Dutch Reformed (Nederduitse Gereformeerde) mother and mission churches.

• For the first time in history a non-white pastor has been elected as moderator of the synod of the African Reformed Church in Northern Rhodesia. The synod met at Madzimoyo, near Fort Jameson, with the Rev. Wilson Khondowe in the chair. This church, which is one of the daughter churches of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, consists of 21 congregations with 18,000 communicant members.

• A public debate, attended by about 20,000 Christians and Moslems, was held in Cape Town on 13th August. Mr. Ahmed Deedat, chairman of

the Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban, had challenged a representative of the Christian faith to prove from the Bible that Christ had died on the cross. His challenge was accepted by the Rev. D. Pypers, a missionary of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk among the Moslems.

● The various Dutch Reformed (Nederduitse Gereformeerde) mother and mission churches in South Africa all complied with the request of the provisional committee of the All-Africa Church Conference to set aside the first Sunday in July as a day of prayer for the peoples of Africa and their rulers.

● Mr. T. H. S. Barnard, principal of the training school for non-white teachers at the Dutch Reformed mission station at Gutu, in Southern Rhodesia, has been awarded the M.B.E. by the Queen of Great Britain.

● The South African Academy for Science and Arts has awarded the Stals prize to Professor G. B. A. Gerdener, of Stellenbosch. Professor Gerdener, who celebrated his 80th birthday on 31st March, is the author of a large number of books of considerable merit, including "Recent Developments in the South African Mission Field".

● Mission weeks were held in several cities and towns last month to stimulate interest in the missionary cause. Such weeks were arranged in Pretoria, Stellenbosch, Bloemfontein and elsewhere. In Pretoria, mass gatherings on four consecutive days drew crowds of several thousands.

● A contribution for the missionary work of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in the Northern Transvaal has been received from a congregation of the Christian Reformed Church in New York, U.S.A. The money was collected after a student from South Africa had addressed the congregation on missionary work in this country.

● An organisation which aims at evangelising the non-white peoples of Africa by means of the radio has been formed at Stellenbosch. The organisation, which is named Christian Radio Action, will try to determine the extent to which existing transmitters can be used to spread the Gospel, and will eventually also consider the possibility of special transmitters for that purpose.

● The Rev. Hendrik Hofmeyr, who had served as a missionary in the Pietersburg area for more than 50 years, died on 21st June. He was 91. He was a son of the Rev. Stephanus Hofmeyr, the famous pioneer missionary of the Northern Transvaal.

● The twelve mission hospitals of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in the Transvaal admitted 27,000 non-white patients last year. The total number of treatments, including out-patients, was 198,000.

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